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ABSTRACT

This is the final report of the Joint Planning Group for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, whose purpose was to detail proposals for a new agency to improve quality and standards for higher education in the United Kingdom. It proposes that a UK-wide single agency replace the existing Higher Education Quality Council by October 1998. The structure and function of the new agency is discussed as are issues concerning quality assurance, the review process, academic standards, and the form of reviews and outcomes (reports). Also discussed are subject/program area reviews, review cycles and teams, and institutional observers. Collaboration with other organizations such as the Teacher Training Agency is urged. The new agency's functions are identified and include: (1) confirming that their internal quality assurance procedures work well; (2) identifying and disseminating information about innovation and best practice in teaching, learning and student assessment, and (3) providing specific services. Also discussed is transition to the new agency, funding, and cost implications. Attached are a glossary of terms, the Joint Planning Group Terms of Reference document, a list of the Joint Group's members, the Terms of Reference document of the Joint Planning Group Working Part, recommendations regarding higher education and professional and statutory bodies, and recommendations concerning the constitution and membership of the new agency. (LEE)

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ED 409 811

Joint Planning Group for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Final Report

17 December 1996

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Glossary of terms

AAU	Academic Audit Unit
CCETSW	Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work
COSHEP	Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals
CVCP	Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DENI	Department of Education for Northern Ireland
FHE	Further and Higher Education
GSP	Graduate Standards Programme
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Council
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
NIHEC	Northern Ireland Higher Education Council
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
OHMCI	Office of Her Majesty's Inspector for Schools
PSB	Professional and Statutory Body
QAD	Quality Assessment Division
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
SCOP	Standing Conference of Principals
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SOEID	Scottish Office Education and Industry Department
TTA	Teacher Training Agency
WOED	Welsh Office Education Department

Assuring the quality of higher education

Executive summary

1. This is the Joint Planning Group's final report. We believe that our proposals bring significant gains that will both reduce, and assist higher education institutions in managing, the number and level of external demands placed on them. They are intended to help institutions improve the quality and standards of their educational provision; provide public information on the quality and standards of that provision; and satisfy the responsibilities of the funding councils to account for the public money invested in higher education. [paragraph 6 of the report] The Group published an interim report in April 1996 and a draft of this final report in September 1996. Both were widely circulated, and generated considerable interest - almost two hundred responses in total were received - for which we were very grateful. [3]

2. We recommend the establishment of a single agency with a UK-wide remit as soon as possible, and the creation of an integrated process of quality assurance. We are mindful of the importance of ensuring that, from the start, the new agency takes full account of the diverse national requirements of, and educational arrangements in, different parts of the UK. The new agency will take over all the functions of the HEQC, and the main assessment functions of those funding councils choosing to contract with the agency for the discharge of those functions. The HEQC will be wound up. Our report indicates:

   a. the services that the new agency should provide;
   b. what its constitution and membership should be; and
   c. the shape of the transitional arrangements which will be necessary. [7]

3. Our proposals are a blueprint for the future rather than an operational manual. Specifying the details of the new arrangements will be the task of the new quality assurance agency following the development and piloting of, and consultation on, the arrangements proposed in this report [38], which is being sent to the commissioning bodies and Ministers.

An integrated process of quality assurance

4. The new agency will operate an integrated process of quality assurance covering the totality of each institution's provision, wherever and however delivered, and however funded, which will secure significant benefits for institutions. [8] Our proposals: can and should eliminate overlap and duplication [14]; are sufficiently flexible to accommodate a wide range of academic structures; involve discussion between the agency and each institution concerning the number, scope and timing of reviews; enable the agency and each institution to harmonise internal and external review arrangements; and involve the head of each institution in the composition of review teams. [9 & 32]

5. The quality assurance framework outlined in this report assumes that institutions will monitor and review their own provision, whilst the agency will manage a series of external reviews of that provision and the effectiveness of each institution's internal review procedures. [9]

6. The main elements of the Group's proposals for an integrated process of quality assurance are:

   a. an eight-year, national review timetable to be published by the agency; [10]
   b. a maximum number of units of subject/programme review; [27]

c. grouping cognate subject/programme areas within the agency timetable to facilitate the possibility of combining reviews of subject/programme areas and help to ensure that limiting the review period of each subject/programme area to two years does not inhibit flexibility; [26 & 29]

d. an institutional quality assurance programme agreed with the agency setting out the educational provision to be reviewed over the eight-year cycle and reflecting the institution's own priorities, educational provision, and academic structures; [11]

e. flexibility for each institution to agree with the agency the number, scope and timing of reviews to enable an institutional perspective to be brought to bear on the process from the outset, and ensure that the agency and the institution can harmonise internal and external review arrangements; [26 & 27]

f. the opportunity for each institution to combine subject/programme reviews within the agreed institutional quality assurance programme, thereby reducing the number of 'engagements' with the agency; [27 & 52]

g. the possibility of extending the subject/programme review period for subjects where there is a case for combination of units, for instance, or where a professional and statutory body (PSB) timetable could be more satisfactorily accommodated. [29]

h. the timing of subject/programme area reviews to accommodate the accreditation arrangements of the PSBs, where relevant, thus allowing scope for greater collaboration with such bodies. [26 & 29]

i. confirmation of the extent to which an institution as a whole is discharging its educational responsibilities and has procedures securely in place which will enable it to continue to do so. [24]

7. Our proposals invite each institution to indicate the way in which the academic standards students are expected to attain in each subject/programme area under review are identified, and their attainment monitored and described. In addition, the new agency will, by means of institution-wide review, consider the arrangements made by each higher education institution for maintaining academic standards in the institution as a whole. [18]

8. Taken as a whole, the process will assess the extent to which an institution is discharging its responsibilities for teaching and learning effectively at subject/programme level; indicate areas of strength and weakness, including areas of activity requiring attention; involve an evaluation of the validity and reliability of an institution's internal review procedures, and provide reassurance that each institution has in place effective arrangements for assuring academic standards in the institution. [15]

9. The review process will involve visits to institutions and result in reports published by the agency. The Chair of each team would be appointed by the agency and would be responsible for the team's published report. Other members of the team would be nominated by the head of the institution and agreed with the agency which would formally appoint them . There should be published criteria for the composition of review teams all of whose members would be academic and, where appropriate, professional peers chosen from a list of appropriately trained reviewers. Training would be an agency responsibility. [32]

10. Institutions will be able to nominate an observer to each review team. [33]

11. We would expect the agency to give priority to collaboration with various partners, including the TTA in England, PSBs and the NHS building on existing collaborative activity as appropriate [34 & 35]

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The establishment of a new quality agency.

12. We propose that:

a. the new quality agency be a company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity; [E 1 a]
b. the company's members be the representative bodies of the heads of higher education institutions; [E 2]
c. there be 14 directors on the board of the company: four directors appointed by the HEIs' representative bodies; four directors appointed by the funding bodies (the funding councils and DENI); and six 'independent' directors representative of the wider community with an interest in quality and standards in higher education. [E 3] Wide consultation will ensure a spread of experience and ensure that a balance is achieved, and maintained, among the various parties on the board [E 8 b & 9].

13. We propose two types of service level agreement:

a. between the agency and the institutions' representative bodies; and
b. between the agency and the funding bodies. [43]

14. The link between both types of agreement would be provided by a common *foundation document*, which would be a single statement of the integrated quality assurance process. These SLAs would differ in their scope and in the range of the required outputs, including their handling of individual national requirements and approaches across the different parts of the UK. [43]

15. These agreements will enable the agency to:

a. confirm that institutions' internal quality assurance procedures are working effectively; [40 a]
b. identify and disseminate information about innovation and best practice in teaching, learning and student assessment; [40 b]
c. provide reports about quality and standards in individual institutions, subjects, programmes and aspects of provision, and about quality and standards for both domestic and overseas audiences; [44 b]
d. undertake quality enhancement activities; [44 c] and
e. focus on those issues necessary for the funding bodies to secure their responsibilities for public accountability and public information. [45]

16. We expect that the funding councils and DENI will wish to make it a condition of their grants to institutions that they draw on the agency's services to the extent that is necessary to allow the agency to meet the terms of its service level agreements with those bodies. [42]

17. The agency may also wish to contract, as appropriate, with Government Departments and other bodies (for example, research councils and PSBs), and with institutions not in membership of the representative bodies and/or not in receipt of public funds. [42]

Transition arrangements

18. The agency's immediate tasks on establishment will be to:

a. ensure that the momentum of current programmes for assessment and audit is maintained; [54]
b. assume responsibility for running the existing programmes of audit and assessment, and all HEQC's other functions, as soon as practicable following the establishment of the agency; [58 & 59]
c. pilot, develop and consult upon the new process [14, 25, 27, 33, 38 & 53]

Cost implications

19. For planning purposes we consider that the agency's initial costs should not exceed the total current expenditure on quality assessment of the participating funding bodies, and of the HEQC on its current functions and programmes. Over time costs should reduce through efficiencies achieved by combining currently separate organisations, efficiency savings generally, and lengthening some existing review cycles; and if the number of engagements between institutions and the agency is reduced. [48] In addition, our proposals envisage savings from elimination of the current duplication between audit and assessment and, in due course, between the requirements of the new agency and those of professional and statutory bodies. [51]

Background

1. The CVCP's Academic Audit Unit was established in 1990. On the other side of the binary line the former Council for National Academic Awards was responsible for validating and awarding the qualifications of polytechnics and colleges of higher education. In 1992 the Government set up the Higher Education Funding Councils with quality assessment responsibilities. The machinery set up by the Councils for this purpose operates alongside the quality audit machinery which is now part of the HEQC. Within the universities and colleges there is a widespread feeling that these arrangements lead to overlap and duplication, thus creating unnecessary work.

2. Following an initiative by the HEFCE, CVCP and SCOP in the Summer of 1995 Ministers welcomed the establishment of a Joint Planning Group to produce proposals for developing quality assurance arrangements, including proposals for a single agency. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment agreed terms of reference (Annex A) and membership (Annex B) proposed by an informal group consisting of representatives of CVCP, COSHEP, SCOP, HEFCE and HEFCW. She also agreed to the appointment of Sir William Fraser as Chairman of the Group.

3. The Group has met eight times. It published an interim report in April 1996 and a draft of this final report in September 1996. Both were widely circulated, and generated considerable interest - almost two hundred responses in total were received - for which we were very grateful. We have given detailed consideration to the comments received and, as a result, have sought to clarify our views in a number of areas. We were also helped by the report of a working party chaired by one of our members and including members from institutions. The working party was asked to develop the quality assurance framework set out in our interim report, and it took into account responses to that report as they were received. The terms of reference and full membership of the working party are at Annex C. In addition, a consultation meeting with professional and statutory bodies (PSBs) in June was attended by about fifty representatives.

4. Our Secretaries were Diana Warwick, CVCP and Rob Hull, HEFCE; and they were supported by Martin Johnson, HEFCE, David Parry, HEQC and David Young, CVCP. The nature of the issues before us and the consultation requirements included in our terms of reference put a heavy burden on this team, and we are very grateful to them for their support and for their patience and courtesy.

The purposes of quality assurance

5. In developing the proposals contained in this report, we have given careful consideration to the purposes of quality assurance in higher education. We believe that the prime responsibility of an external quality assurance agency should be to support higher education institutions in discharging their responsibility for the maintenance and enhancement of the quality and standards of their educational provision. Students, both within and beyond the UK, need to know about the quality and standards of educational provision in an increasingly diverse higher education sector. So do employers, who recruit the graduates of higher education institutions, the taxpayer and Parliament, which has placed on the funding bodies a statutory responsibility to ensure proper accountability for the use of public funds.

6. **Against this background, we believe that the purposes of quality assurance in higher education can be summarised as follows:**

a. to facilitate continuous quality improvement through the sharing of good practice and innovation;
b. to enable the funding bodies and institutions to discharge their statutory responsibilities;
c. to provide timely and accessible public information, on a consistent and, where possible, comparable basis, on the quality and standards of the educational provision for which each institution is responsible;
d. to ensure that any unacceptable provision is speedily addressed.

7. We recommend the establishment of a single quality assurance agency with a UK-wide remit as soon as possible. The relationship between it, the institutions, and the funding councils should be one of partnership and co-operation. It should replace the HEQC, all of whose functions should be transferred to the new agency, as should the main quality assessment functions of those funding councils choosing to contract with the agency for the discharge of these functions. By saying 'main' we recognise that the funding councils will need to develop a capacity to deal with the agency on quality assurance matters. Their respective quality assessment committees will continue to advise them on quality assessment matters. We suggest what its constitution and membership should be and the shape of the transitional arrangements which will be necessary. In recommending that the new agency have a UK-wide remit, we are nevertheless mindful of the importance of ensuring that, from the start, it takes full account of the diverse national requirements of, and educational arrangements in, different parts of the UK.

8. We are sensitive to the criticism that what we propose might be represented as simply a continuation of audit and assessment but under a single body. We do not believe this to be the case: we envisage the new agency operating an integrated process of quality assurance covering the totality of each institution's provision, wherever and however delivered, and however funded, which will secure significant benefits for institutions. We believe it will be possible for benefits to be secured through collaboration with Professional and Statutory Bodies (PSBs), the National Health Service (NHS), the Research Councils and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). We recognise that such bodies have a variety of statutory duties which may constrain the extent or nature of collaboration with the new agency, but we are encouraged by our contact with many of them to believe that there is a common wish to reduce costs and burdens wherever possible, and to maximise the potential which we believe our proposals make possible.

9. Our proposals are sufficiently flexible to accommodate a wide range of academic structures; involve discussion between the agency and each institution concerning the number, scope and timing of reviews; enable the agency and each institution to harmonise internal and external review arrangements; and involve the head of each institution in the composition of review teams. The quality assurance processes outlined in this report assume that institutions will monitor and review their own provision, whilst the agency will manage an integrated programme of reviews of that provision and the effectiveness of each institution's internal review procedures.

The quality assurance process

Agency review timetable and institutional quality assurance programme

10. We propose that the agency publish a national eight-year timetable for institution-wide and subject/programme area reviews. Within this timetable subject/programme areas would be grouped into blocks of subjects in two-year periods. Each subject/programme would be reviewed once in every eight-year cycle, and at an agreed point the agency would conduct a review of an institution's overall management of its quality assurance processes.

11. Each institution would be invited to map all its provision on to the national timetable in a comprehensive 'institutional quality assurance programme' to be agreed with the agency. Each programme will set out the educational provision to be reviewed over the eight-year cycle, including details of any reviews by professional and statutory bodies and any other relevant external agencies during that period. The first such programmes will accommodate, where relevant, the completion of the scheduled quality assessment programmes of the various funding councils, and provide for them to be carried out within the timetables already published by those councils. The programme will reflect the institution's own priorities, educational provision, and academic structures and will inform the discussions which we envisage will take place between the institution and the agency. It should also assist institutions that wish to do so to harmonise their internal monitoring and review arrangements with the agency's timetable. In agreeing its obligations under the institutional quality assurance programmes, the agency will have regard to the level of resources available to it through the relevant service level agreements (SLAs).

The review process

12. The new agency will consider the quality and standards of educational provision at subject/programme level in each institution, however delivered and however funded, by means of subject/programme area review. In addition to the need to meet the obligations laid on the funding councils, this approach acknowledges that it is at subject/programme level that staff and students engage most regularly, and that it is subject/programme information which prospective students particularly seek.

13. The new agency will also review the arrangements made by each higher education institution for assuring academic standards in the institution as a whole. This acknowledges that responsibility for quality and standards, and the means by which they are assured, resides ultimately with an institution corporately, and not with its constituent elements. Many activities crucial to academic standards and quality are normally provided, resourced and managed on an institution-wide basis. These may include library, laboratory and IT services; student support and guidance services, including provision for international students; staff induction, appraisal and development; and the dissemination of good practice within an institution. In addition, many matters covered by the Higher Education Charters, including student complaints, institutional publicity and recruitment material, are normally an institution-wide responsibility.

14. In the light of our working party's report, we believe that the processes to be developed by the agency can and should eliminate overlap and duplication; but this will require detailed consultation between the new agency and institutions prior to October 1998. In particular, detailed consideration will need to be given to the scope for collaboration with professional and statutory bodies, building on current collaboration, and on the flexibility given by the institutional quality assurance programme. Consideration will also need to be given to the most appropriate and cost-effective ways to evaluate the quality assurance arrangements associated with those activities referred to in paragraph 11.

15. Taken as a whole, the process will assess the extent to which an institution is discharging its responsibilities for teaching and learning effectively at subject/programme level; indicate areas of strength and weakness, including areas of activity requiring attention; involve an evaluation of the validity and reliability of an institution's internal review procedures, and provide reassurance that each institution has in place effective arrangements for assuring academic standards in the institution.

Academic standards

16. Throughout our discussions we have been conscious of the request in our terms of reference that we should give a 'steer' on the matter of academic standards. The term 'standards' is sometimes used for comparison over time, as in the question 'is the standard required for a first class honours degree in engineering from the university of X higher or lower than it was twenty years ago?' It is sometimes used to compare degrees of different institutions; and it may also be used to indicate what an institution is seeking to achieve in terms of the quality of its degrees, the educational experience which it provides, what it expects of students, and the level of student attainment within the institution. We have kept in touch with the work of the HEQC's Graduate Standards Programme (GSP), noting that the main focus of attention of the GSP has been on output standards, defined as '... the nature and levels of student attainment associated with the award of an undergraduate degree ...' It is in this last sense that we use the word 'standards' in this report.

17. We have also considered the matter of the 'appropriateness' of standards. Our approach to this assumes that the standards which are deemed appropriate for the award of a particular qualification are a shared responsibility involving those who design and validate programmes, those who teach and assess students, and those who award the degrees or diplomas. Higher learning is a complex activity and the output standards associated with it are necessarily rooted in, and realised through, the learning process engaged in by students and the expert practice and judgements of academics and other professionals. There will always be a need for opportunities to exchange and confirm peer judgement. In our view, it would be neither appropriate nor desirable for the new agency to define what the standards of degrees and other awards should be in terms of curricular content and assessment criteria.

18. Our proposals invite each institution to indicate the way in which the academic standards students are expected to attain in each subject/programme area under review are identified, and their attainment monitored and described. In addition, the new agency will, by means of institution-wide review, consider the arrangements made by each higher education institution for maintaining academic standards in the institution as a whole.

Form of reviews

19. We envisage that aspects of provision to be covered by subject/programme area review will be based broadly on those currently covered by quality assessment. The agency will also be expected to develop proposals to ensure that the processes are able to cover provision not currently addressed by quality assessment, namely research degrees and diplomas, and provision not funded by the funding councils.

20. It will be the responsibility of those conducting subject/programme area review to consider:

a. the way in which the academic standards which an institution expects students to attain in the area under review are identified by the provider unit involved;

b. the way in which the attainment of those standards is monitored; and
c. the form in which their attainment is described.

21. Subject/programme area review reports will be based on evidence provided by an institution of the quality and standards of educational provision in that area, and on evidence gathered by a review team during a review visit. The review process will need to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate a wide range of academic structures, both in subject and organisational terms, and a variety of sources of evidence. The latter will include evidence generated by each institution's internal monitoring and review processes, which normally include an external contribution. It might also include evidence generated to meet the requirements of external bodies such as professional and statutory bodies, Office for Standards in Education, and the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Schools (OHMCI) in both Scotland and Wales.

22. The agency will report separately on an institution's overall quality strategy, and the arrangements by which it assures its academic standards, its learning infrastructure, and its internal and external communications. In addition, it will cover the quality assurance arrangements for any collaborative work with other institutions or organisations, in this country and overseas. Institution-wide review will consider an institution's own account of its quality management arrangements; the experience and record of subject/programme area reviews; and will involve a visit to the institution by a review team. The precise emphasis of each institution-wide review will be subject to discussion between the agency and the individual institution, and may involve a review of areas of activities identified by the institution itself and not referred to above.

23. Against the background set out in paragraphs 11 and 16, a substantial majority of the Group considers that all institutions should be subject to an institution-wide review once in each eight-year cycle. The alternative approach which the majority does not favour would be to require such a review only where there is some concern about an institution as a result of evidence from subject/programme area review or some other external cause.

Outcomes

24. Each review will result in a report published by the agency. At the subject/programme level these reports will involve consideration of the quality and standards of educational provision, however delivered and funded, with the strengths and weaknesses of such provision summarised. At the institutional level they will involve consideration of an institution's policies and arrangements for securing its educational objectives, and the management by it of its quality and quality assurance processes. They will describe the extent to which an institution as a whole is discharging its educational responsibilities and has procedures securely in place which will enable it to continue to do so.

25. Within the higher education sector there is great diversity of missions. When the polytechnics obtained university title in 1992, Ministers laid great emphasis on the maintenance of diversity of mission. But the greater the diversity, the more difficult it is to construct a system which provides comparable information about institutions and subjects across the sector. The need to provide such information wherever possible must be taken into account in settling the detailed criteria to be used by review teams in reaching their judgements, and the way in which they are described, including the use of a graded profile. The way in which these activities and the quality assurance systems associated with them are reviewed by the agency will be for determination by it following consultation with institutions prior to the implementation of the new arrangements from October 1998. The

form of the various service level agreements which we propose to be concluded with the funding councils and DENI and with the institutions' representative bodies will obviously be relevant in this context.

Arranging subject/programme area reviews

26. We propose that each institution be invited to discuss with the agency the timing of subject/programme area reviews, and their focus. This could include the possibility of combining subject/programme areas across the eight-year cycle. An institution's quality assurance programme will enable an institutional perspective to be brought to bear on the process from the outset, and ensure that the agency and the institution can harmonise internal and external review arrangements. Such discussion should also seek to accommodate the accreditation arrangements of professional and statutory bodies where relevant.

27. We propose that the agency publish a national framework with a maximum number of units of subject/programme review. The number and nature of those units will be the subject of consultation, although the Group thinks that disaggregation beyond the level of current practice, under which for example HEFCE uses a maximum of 61 units, would be uneconomic. Each institution would be invited to use this framework to map all of its provision on to the agency review timetable, agreeing with the agency the number, scope and timing of reviews. Those institutions wishing to combine units, thereby reducing the number of 'engagements', would be free to do so within limits determined by the new agency following consultation with institutions prior to the implementation of the new arrangements. Likewise, those that wish to proceed on the most disaggregated basis possible will be able to do so, within the limit set by the national framework's maximum number of units.

Review cycles for individual subject/programme areas

28. In letters to the Chairman of the CVCP and the Chief Executive of the HEFCE in the Summer of 1995, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment indicated her concern at the possibility that the assessment of individual subject areas would take place over a too lengthy period. She proposed that the length of time within which any individual subject was reviewed should not exceed two years. We have considered the implications of this in the light of the diversity of the educational provision and academic structures of higher education institutions, and in the light of representations from professional and statutory bodies. Most of them review provision on a rolling basis every three, four or five years, and may have problems with an overall cycle of eight years.

29. The extent to which reviewing subject/programmes within a two-year period raises difficulties will become clearer as institutional quality assurance programmes are agreed with the agency. Grouping cognate subject/programme areas within the eight-year agency timetable should help to ensure that limiting the review period of each subject/programme area to two years does not inhibit flexibility. However, in some circumstances the possibility of greater harmonisation with the internal arrangements of institutions, and/or greater collaboration with professional and statutory bodies, would be enhanced if the review period for individual subject/programme areas was extended. We propose that, for review purposes, subject/programmes should normally be grouped into two-year blocks, each comprising, as far as possible, a number of cognate subject/programme areas. Reviews of single units would normally take place within the stated two-year period, but if, within the agreed institutional quality assurance programme, there is a case for combination of units, for

instance, or where a PSB timetable could be more satisfactorily accommodated, then the review period could be extended.

30. We recognise that eight years is a long period between subject/programme area reviews; a good deal can happen in that time. We have, therefore, considered the case for mid-cycle (four-yearly) reviews. We believe that, if these were to be mandatory, the result would, in effect, be to reduce the eight-year cycle to a four-year cycle. This would improve the currency of the public information and the quality enhancement value of the process, but would greatly add to costs and burden. Our proposals involve a programme of reviews with both a subject/programme and institutional focus, the total cost of which we believe can be contained within current costs. We have taken the view that the costs and burden of a four-year cycle would be disproportionate to any added benefits. So far as public information is concerned, institutions also have a responsibility to provide up-to-date, factual information on provision. Where relevant, and in the light of the procedures of individual professional and statutory bodies, accreditation reports could be placed in the public domain by an institution. On quality enhancement, we believe that because most institutions would experience some reviews each year, there will be developmental benefits across subjects within an institution throughout the cycle.

31. Where particular subject/programme area provision is considered to be 'deficient' as a result of a subject/programme area review there would be a **requirement** for a further review visit within a period fixed in accordance with procedures to be laid down by the agency.

Review teams

32. The Chair of each team would be appointed by the agency and would be responsible for the team's published report. Other members of the team would be nominated by the head of the institution and agreed with the agency which would formally appoint them . There should be published criteria for the composition of review teams all of whose members would be academic and, where appropriate, professional peers chosen from a list of appropriately trained reviewers. Training would be an agency responsibility.

Institutional observers

33. Institutions should be able, if they so wish, to nominate an observer to each review team, but such observers would not be members of a team, nor would they be identified with its conclusions. Their precise role would be agreed following consultation between the agency and institutions prior to the implementation of the new quality assurance arrangements from October 1998.

Collaboration with other funding bodies and with professional and statutory bodies

34. Our terms of reference required us to consider the special needs of teacher education and relations with the TTA in England. From the point of view of higher education institutions engaged in initial teacher training (ITT) it would be desirable to deal with only one quality assurance body. However, in England the Secretary of State's responsibility for the teaching profession and the statutory framework within which the TTA operates, place a particular responsibility on that Agency. It has a statutory remit which requires it to take into account evidence from OFSTED inspections of ITT. It accredits providers of ITT inside and outside higher education; and it has a statutory role in relation to quality, standards, recruitment and development within the teaching profession. It is obviously very desirable that there should be the greatest possible co-operation between the new agency and the TTA.

35. We were also required to consider the relationship between the new agency and other partners, including PSBs. Examples of collaboration involving higher education institutions, PSBs and the NHS are given in Annex D. We have been encouraged by the response of PSBs and other funding bodies in our consultation and would expect the agency to give priority to collaboration with them in order to build on existing collaborative activity, and to reduce overlap and duplication.

A dynamic process

36. The quality assurance process for which the new agency will be responsible should be sufficiently flexible to take account of the dynamic and diverse nature of higher education institutions, and the changing environment within which they operate. We would expect the new agency, once established, to keep the quality assurance process itself under review and to ensure its continuing appropriateness to the achievement of the purposes of quality assurance set out above. It should operate as cost effectively as possible and keep to a minimum the level of external demands on institutions.

37. By the time the new quality assurance agency is fully operational from October 1998, the quality of most (in some cases all) of the education funded by the funding councils will have been assessed through their quality assessment processes. In addition, the internal quality assurance arrangements made by all higher education institutions will have been subject to an HEQC quality audit visit. The quality assurance process for which the new agency will be responsible builds, therefore, on considerable experience within institutions themselves, and within the funding councils and the HEQC. It will have available evidence from quality audit that most institutions have in place internal quality control and assurance procedures. Our proposals assume consultation and partnership between the agency and individual institutions and set out how significant responsibility for the management of the external process will be shared between higher education institutions and the agency.

38. Our proposals are a blueprint for the future rather than an operational manual. Specifying the details of the new arrangements will be the task of the new quality assurance agency following development, piloting and consultation on the arrangements proposed in this report.

The new agency

39. The constitution which we propose for the new agency follows closely the ideas which we put forward in our first report. They are set out in Annex E.

The functions of the agency

40. We propose that, under service level agreements, the agency will provide reports to funding bodies and accrediting bodies about quality and standards in individual institutions, subjects, programmes and aspects of provision, and about quality and standards in UK higher education in general for both domestic and overseas audiences. The agency will also agree with institutions, through their representative bodies, to:

a. confirm that their internal quality assurance procedures are working effectively;
b. identify and disseminate information about innovation and best practice in teaching, learning and student assessment;
c. provide specified services.

Condition of funding

41. We believe that quality assurance processes in a form that meets the requirements of the funding councils and DENI, and that commends itself to the institutions, must necessarily embrace the maintenance and enhancement both of quality and standards. We expect, therefore, that the funding councils and DENI will wish to make it a condition of their grants to institutions that they draw on the agency's services to the extent that is necessary to allow the agency to meet the terms of its service level agreements with those bodies.

Funding the agency

Service level agreements

42. The agency's formal relationships with the funding bodies and the institutions (through their representative bodies) will be set out in service level agreements (SLAs). The agency may also wish to contract, as appropriate, with Government Departments and other bodies (for example, research councils and PSBs), and with institutions not in membership of the representative bodies and/or not in receipt of public funds.

43. There would be two types of SLA:

a. between the agency and the institutions' representative bodies;
b. between the agency and the funding bodies.

The link between both types of SLA would be provided by a common *foundation document*, which would be a single statement of the integrated quality assurance process. These SLAs would differ in their scope and in the range of the required outputs, including their handling of individual national requirements and approaches across the different parts of the UK. (With regard to Scotland, we note that the report of the SHEFC/COSHEP review of quality assessment arrangements there - the Miller Review - is currently the subject of consultation). The *foundation document* would reflect the new process. This process would be developed under the first SLAs (which would also provide for other parts of the transition) which we discuss below. The SLA with the funding bodies would be sensitive to the institutions' responsibilities for academic standards. Both types of SLA would involve payment by the customer for services received.

The parties to the agreements

44. We propose that the SLA between the institutions' representative bodies and the agency would cover:

a. the integrated process for quality assurance (*foundation document)*;
b. the outcomes from that process - public reports and information on quality and standards in individual institutions, subjects, programmes and aspects of provision, for a range of domestic (including funding and accrediting bodies and government) audiences and overseas audiences - and including investigative work and summative reports;
c. quality enhancement activities, including summative and investigative work that builds on the agency's published reports, and addresses sector-wide and subject-wide issues;
d. Access Courses Recognition.

45. We propose that the SLA between the funding bodies and the agency, would focus on those issues necessary for the funding bodies to secure their responsibilities for public accountability and public information, namely:

a. the integrated process for quality assurance *(foundation document).*
b. the specific outcomes required by each funding body, in terms of published reports and information, which might include, for example:
    i. content, structure and length of the agency's review reports;
    ii. a graded profile at the subject/programme area level; elements of the profile; and criteria for judgements;
    iii. independence and comparability of judgements;
    iv. publication targets and distribution.

Other Services

46. Other services would require specific contracts with individual institutions, organisations, professional and statutory bodies, or Government Departments, as appropriate. For example:

a. with an institution applying for degree-awarding powers or for university title;
b. with institutions not in receipt of public funds, for their inclusion in the integrated quality assurance process, and for any other specified services;
c. with professional and statutory bodies for services related to accreditation;
d. with Government Departments or other sponsors, in respect of advice or research.

Cost implications

47. We are required by our terms of reference to determine the costs and perceived benefits of the new arrangements by comparison with present arrangements. Such a comparison would, ideally, involve consideration of those costs likely to be incurred centrally by the new agency, and those incurred by institutions. Estimating both is difficult for different reasons. Different factors are taken into account by each institution in calculating the costs to them of responding to external quality assurance requirements. As internal procedures have developed to take account of those requirements, whether of quality audit, quality assessment or of accreditation by professional and statutory bodies, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish in the total costs of institutional quality assurance those solely attributable to external requirements. To these direct costs must also be added the opportunity costs involved.

48. Our proposals for quality assurance imply that significant development and piloting should be carried out by the new agency prior to the implementation of the new arrangements in October 1998. Detailed evaluation of the potential costs to the agency of the new arrangements must necessarily follow such development and piloting. We have not, as a result, felt able to produce, on the basis of the material before us, detailed estimates of relative costs and benefits of present and proposed assurance processes, including possible alternative approaches considered by the Group. For planning purposes we consider that the agency's initial costs should not exceed the total current expenditure on quality assessment of the participating funding bodies, and of the HEQC on its current functions and programmes. Over time costs should reduce through efficiencies achieved by combining currently separate organisations, efficiency savings generally, and lengthening some existing review cycles; and if the number of engagements is reduced. Institutions have noted that our

proposals would bring within the scope of the new process provision which is not currently covered by quality assessment. Depending on the nature and extent of collaboration with PSBs, and to the extent that their own processes will allow, there may be scope for reducing costs to both institutions and to PSBs and other external bodies.

49. We have considered the likely impact on central costs of our proposals compared with the cost of the current level of the HEFCE's quality assessment activities, and of the quality audit activities of the HEQC. We have assumed an eight-year review cycle, and that institutions will be given greater scope than at present for agreeing with the agency arrangements for reviews.

50. The HEFCE's first quality assessment visits took place in early 1993 and the first cycle is timetabled to be completed by the end of the year 2001. This will have involved an average of 250 assessment visits each year over the eight-year period. (Initially, assessment in England did not involve universal visiting. This practice was adopted by the HEFCE with effect from April 1995). In Wales, the first full cycle will end in December 1997. By that time, a total of some 200 assessment visits will have been completed. In Scotland, the first full cycle, involving 317 assessments will be complete in the Summer of 1998. The first quality audit visits took place in early 1991 under the auspices of the former Academic Audit Unit (AAU) of the CVCP. By the end of April 1997, the first full audit cycle, a total of 235 audits will have been carried out, involving on average 40 audit visits each year. In addition, by mid-1997 at least seven visits to audit the quality assurance arrangements of overseas collaborative provision will have been undertaken, four in 1996 and at least three in 1997.

51. We have proposed that the agency publish an eight-year review timetable. This is similar to the current timetable for quality assessment in England, but longer than the six-year timetable for quality audit. This factor alone will reduce the annual average number and cost of institution-wide reviews by comparison with the current arrangements for quality audit. Substantial savings would accrue from doubling the length of the assessment cycle in Wales. If SHEFC decided to contract with the agency for quality assessment on an eight-year cycle of subject/programme reviews, savings should accrue in the longer term. In addition, our proposals envisage savings from elimination of the current duplication between audit and assessment and, in due course, between the requirements of the new agency and those of professional and statutory bodies.

52. Our proposals also assume that, within agreed guidelines, and in the context of an institutional quality assurance programme, institutions will be given much greater scope for agreeing with the agency reviews which cover a wider range of subjects. This could reduce the number of engagements with the agency and the number of reviews conducted each year, depending on the extent to which institutions choose to aggregate subjects for review.

53. There may be some consequential reductions in the central administrative load arising from carrying out fewer engagements. At the same time, the administrative load is likely to increase because of increasing flexibility and negotiation with institutions, although greater harmonisation with institutions' internal structures, timetables and priorities, through the institutional quality assurance programme should reduce institutions' opportunity costs in responding to external quality assurance requirements. Finally, the agency will have development costs, particularly in the financial year 1997-98, as it develops, pilots and consults on the new process.

Transition arrangements

54. Our terms of reference require the Group to provide for a transitional period which, while the momentum of current programmes for assessment and audit is maintained, allows for a staged development of the new arrangements. The new agency will, therefore, have the task of implementing the new arrangements, after development, piloting and consultation.

55. In order to take account of the different timetables and life cycles of the current processes of audit and assessment, implementation should be in stages as indicated below.

56. The continuation of the HEQC audit arrangements will make maximum use of existing internal and external assessment and review reports.

57. The new reviews will start, following development, piloting and consultation, from October 1998. The 1996-1998 round of quality assessments in England will be completed under currently published arrangements. For English institutions, the first of the proposed institutional quality assurance programmes will need to incorporate, where relevant, the HEFCE units of assessment currently timetabled for 1998-2000 and 2000-2001 and provide for these reviews to be carried out within the previously published timetable. For institutions in Wales, the first plans would need to be carefully structured so that the second cycle scheduled to commence in October 1998 could align itself with the review programme elsewhere in the UK. If SHEFC decided to contract with the agency, the position in Scotland at the date of the commencement of the contract would be similar to that in Wales in 1998.

58. The new agency should be formally established by the beginning of April 1997, and begin work on developing, piloting and consulting on, the assurance processes to be managed by it from October 1998. As soon as practicable following its establishment the agency will, during 1997, assume responsibility for running the existing programmes of audit and assessment up to October 1998.

59. The agency's activities from the date of its establishment until completion of the design of the new process, will be set out in SLAs with the funding bodies and the representative bodies. These will provide for the foregoing transitional tasks and access to resources and will provide for the associated transfer of functions to the agency. The HEQC would be wound up in this phase.

Future work

60. The company's Memorandum and Articles of Association will be finalised.

61. The company's first board of directors will be established along the lines set out in Annex E.

62. The first board will appoint the first chief executive after advertisement of, and interview for, the position.

63. The agency will have as one if its first tasks the negotiation of service level agreements.

64. Staff affected by the establishment of the new agency will be consulted, and arrangements put in place for their transfer to the new agency.

Joint Planning Group for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions: Terms of Reference

Introduction

1. Members of the group will include CVCP, SCOP and HEFCE, COSHEP, the Northern Ireland HEC and HEFCW. Assessors from DENI, DfEE, SOEID and WOED will be invited. SHEFC will be invited to appoint an observer on the basis of the Secretary of State for Scotland's request that they should be appropriately involved in further planning but without commitment at this stage.

2. The independent Chairman, confirmed by the Secretary of State, will be Sir William Fraser.

Aims

3. The aim of the group will be to develop in detail proposals for a new Agency submitted to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on 20 July, and to produce an agreed implementation plan. The primary function of the new Agency will be to provide a service for assuring the quality of higher education and the standards of programmes and awards for HE institutions in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and if appropriate, HE institutions in Scotland. The aim is to start the new Agency by January 1997.

4. To achieve this the group will need to:

- draw up the specifications for an integrated quality assurance process which will supersede the current audit and assessment processes carried out by HEFCE's and HEFCW's QAD and HEQC, address issues concerning educational standards and the enhancement of teaching and learning, and ensure the availability of appropriate public reports;

- determine in respect of the new Agency:

  (i) its powers and responsibilities;

  (ii) the composition of its board of Management;

  (iii) its relationship to the HE sectors of England, Wales and Northern Ireland and if appropriate to the HE sector in Scotland, if the outcome of the current review concludes that Scottish HE institutions wish to participate;

  (iv) its relationship and responsibilities to the Funding Councils of England and Wales, to the Northern Ireland office and to other funding bodies and professional and statutory bodies;

- identify a strategy and the timetable to ensure a suitable transition from the existing processes of audit and assessment to the integrated processes of the new Agency;

- determine the method of funding of the services provided by the new Agency;

- determine the supplementary functions which the Agency will provide.

With respect to these aims, the group will need to ensure that appropriate consultation takes place with the HE sectors in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and of HE institutions in Scotland, that its proposals enable the Funding Councils to fulfil their statutory duties, and that, with respect to academic standards, the arrangements will obviate any need for the Secretary of State to exercise her reserve powers under the FHE Act 1992.

Context

5. In pursuit of its aims the Group will have regard to:

- the conditions set out in the letters to the Chairman of CVCP and the Chief Executive of HEFCE from the Secretary of State for Education and Employment dated 21 September 1995 headed "Developing Quality Assurance in Partnership with Institutions of Higher Education";

- the letter to the Secretary of State for Scotland form the Chairman of the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals (COSHEP) dated 21 September 1995 and the reply from the Secretary of State for Scotland dated 22 September 1995 headed "Further Arrangements for Quality Assurance of Higher Education";

- the CVCP proposals submitted to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on 20 July 1995 documented in "Developing Quality Assurance in Partnership with Institutions of Higher Education";

- the HEFCW submission to the Secretary of State for Wales dated June 1995 - "The Development of Quality Assurance in Wales";

- the SCOP submission to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment dated July 1995.

Consultation

6. Before concluding its final report, the Group will ensure that it has:

- consulted with HE institutions in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales and with the representative bodies of the Heads of those institutions, COSHEP, CVCP, SCOP and the meeting of Heads of HEIs in Wales;

- fully consulted with the Funding Councils and that its proposals ensure that the Funding Councils are able to fulfil their statutory responsibilities;

- further consulted with such other bodies, agencies and groups with a direct or indirect interest in higher education as seems appropriate, including HEQC,

the professional statutory bodies and the bodies representing academic staff and students.

Reports

7. The Group will report to the Secretaries of State and others on a three-monthly basis and, following the consultation referred to in paragraph 6, will provide the with a final report.

Scotland

8. In the event of SHEFC, COSHEP and the Scottish Office so determining, these terms of reference shall be appropriately amended to ensure participant representation of SHEFC on the group and, all cases, references to England, Northern Ireland and Wales shall be amended to read England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

Terms of Reference

Detailed Requirements

In order to meet the secretary of State's requirements, set out in her letter of 21 September 1995, and to achieve the aims set out above, the group will need in particular to:

a. determine a structure for the governance and operation of the Agency which respects the academic autonomy of institutions and their individual responsibility for standards, but also meets the needs of the Funding Councils in respect of their duties to secure arrangements for assessing the quality of the education for which they provide funds;

b. establish arrangements for assurance which balance the need for independence and consistency in the process with the need to have regard for institutions' own self-evaluation and review;

c. determine the costs and perceived benefits of the new arrangements and compare these with present costs and benefits;

d. provide for a transitional period which, while the momentum of current programmes for assessment and audit is maintained, allows for staged development towards the new arrangements to commence;

e. continue the dialogue with all relevant institutions in Scotland with a view to the possible emergence of a UK wide scheme;

f. i. determine the appropriate point for the external evaluation of the educational effectiveness of institutions;

ii. ensure that, in promoting a greater degree of synchronisation between institutions' own departmental reviews and the assessment of subject and programme areas by the Agency, there is sufficient currency in the outcomes of students and employers for up-to-date, comparative information on the quality of cognate areas across the sectors;

iii. determine an appropriate cycle of reviews of cognate areas;

g. determine the arrangements for the recruitment, training and deployment of assessors to provide for equity and integrity in the new arrangements;

h. ensure continuity in many of the functions now provided by HEQC and, in particular, establish how the Agency can offer advice to the Secretary of State on applicants for degree awarding powers and the university title;

i. ensure that the new arrangements can earn the confidence of the international community;

j. take steps to allow for the continuity of employment of staff currently engaged in work on standards in HEQC, and on quality in HEQC and the QADs of the Funding Councils;

k. take into account and provide a steer for the work on standards which will continue parallel to the work of the Joint Planning Group;

l. allow for a research and development function for the new Agency which might include innovation in teaching methods and the development and dissemination of good practice.

m. make recommendations on the nature and level of service agreements which the new Agency will need to enter into with the parent bodies and appropriate agreements with its various partners, including the professional bodies throughout the UK and the special needs of teacher education and relations with the TTA;

n. evaluate the need for an external system of dealing with student complaints.

Membership of the Joint Planning Group

Chairman	Sir William Fraser
Members	
Nominated by HEFCE:	Professor Brian Fender, Chief Executive, HEFCE Professor David Watson, Director, University of Brighton (formerly Chairman of HEFCE Quality Assessment Committee)
Nominated by the Chief Executive of HEFCW:	Mr Mike Laugharne, Head of Quality Assurance Division, HEFCW
Nominated by SHEFC:	Professor John Sizer, Chief Executive, SHEFC
Nominated by CVCP: Sheffield	Professor Gareth Roberts, Vice-Chancellor, University of (currently Chairman of CVCP) Mr John Stoddart, Principal, Sheffield Hallam University (currently Chairman of HEQC)
Nominated by SCOP:	Dr Martin Gaskell, Director, Nene College, Northampton (currently Chairman of SCOP)
Nominated by COSHEP:	Professor John Arbuthnott, Principal, University of Strathclyde (formerly Convenor of COSHEP) until June 1996. Professor Richard Shaw, Principal, University of Paisley (currently Convenor of COSHEP) from July 1996.
Nominated by NIHEC:	Professor Peter Bush, Vice-Principal, Glasgow Caledonian University
Assessors	
Nominated by DfEE:	Ms Caroline Macready
Nominated by SOEID:	Mr Tom Kelly until April 1996 Mr Ian Walford from May 1996 Mr Graeme Dixon on 8 November 1996
Nominated by WOED:	Mr Bob Evans
Joint Secretariat	CVCP and HEFCE, with support from HEQC

Joint Planning Group Working Party

Terms of Reference

1. To develop a framework for a single process of quality assurance for higher education guaranteeing commonality of approach to institutions, and integrating issues of subject-level activity, institutional effectiveness and standards. In respect of each institution, the process should contain three elements as follows:

a. Rigorous, self-critical internal review with appropriate external participation. Any such review, which could be subject/programme related or an institutional overview, would be commissioned by and report to the head of the institution.

b. Agency-managed, external subject/programme area review which would:
   i. take into account the reports of subject/programme reviews at a. above;
   ii. guarantee openness, independence of judgement, consistency of process and comparability of outcomes across the sector;
   iii. lead to published reports;
   iv. address issues of academic standards and quality enhancement
   v. involve external assessors appointed by, and reporting to, the agency.

c. Agency-managed, external institution-wide review, examining overall provision, at set intervals, and in a form which might cover central services and aspects of standards, and have regard to the accumulated results of the reviews described in a. and b. above.

2. The framework should build on the proposals outlined in the interim report of the JPG, including reference (at paragraph 27 to 29) to existing and planned co-operation between the funding councils and HEQC on the one hand, and professional and statutory bodies on the other.

3. In developing the framework, the Working Party should consider the following questions:

a. what criteria should the new agency use to satisfy itself that an institution's internal quality assurance processes are effective, valid and reliable; and how should those criteria be applied?

b. in what way(s) could the new process reduce demands on institutions?

c. what steps should be taken by October 1998 to address the matter of academic standards within each element of the framework?

4. The Working Party should complete its work in time for the JPG Meeting on 14 June 1996.

Membership

5. The Working Party will be chaired by Professor David Watson, a member of the JPG.

6. It will include members of staff with responsibility for quality assurance at a senior level in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom as follows:

a. Mrs Jennifer Bone
Pro Vice-Chancellor
The University of the West of England

b. Dr Ron Emanuel
Director of Quality Assurance
University of Glasgow

c. Dr David Timms
Assistant Director
Bath College of Higher Education

7. Dr Paul Clark, Director of Quality Assessment, the Higher Education Funding Council (until September 1996).

8. Mr Peter Williams, Director of the Quality Assurance Group, the Higher Education Quality Council.

9. The Working Party will be serviced by David W Parry of the JPG Secretariat's support group.

Higher education and professional and statutory bodies

1. Work has already been undertaken, by the HEQC, by the HEFCE and by the HEFCW, on links between the higher education sector and professional and statutory bodies. The HEQC has, for example, carried out a mapping exercise of the accreditation criteria prescribed in respect of the assurance of quality and standards across some 25 professional and statutory bodies, suggesting that a good deal of collaboration already exists between PSBs in their interaction with higher education institutions. The Quality Assessment Division of the HEFCE has developed models for closer liaison with a wide range of PSBs, and has put arrangements in place with a number of them.

2. We have noted that, working collaboratively, groups of cognate PSBs have, for example, developed:

a. common documentation - using the same documentation for two (or more) separate accreditation events;
b. joint visits - with two (or more) visits taking place at the same time in the higher education institution or unit concerned;
c. joint processes - leading to a single, integrated report and judgement.

The above components may be present in various combinations in particular circumstances.

3. One specific example of what might be achieved is described in the report of the Non-Medical Health Care Education and Training project, which was undertaken by the HEQC, and involved the NHS Executive, relevant PSBs, and higher education institutions providing such education and training. Amongst the project's main recommendations are that these stakeholders should:

a. adopt a single core quality specification covering those areas where there is a shared need for evidence;
b. agree that the specification is incorporated into the quality documents which are already widely used by higher education providers in developing and monitoring course provision;
c. use these quality documents, modified where necessary, as the primary evidence base in their interactions over quality.

4. Since its establishment, the Quality Assessment Division of the HEFCE has considered the possibilities for joint assessment/accreditation visits, or at the very least sharing documentation with PSBs. This has involved reciprocal observation of assessment and accreditation (1993-95); a paper summarising background, processes and a model for joint assessment/accreditation which was sent to PSBs in June 1995; and a joint accreditation/assessment visit involving the Institution of Chemical Engineers in February 1996. This last involved assessment and accreditation teams undertaking separate, but concurrent, processes using shared documentation and information; one assessor also acted as an accreditor. More joint accreditation and assessment visits are planned for the 1996-98 assessment period, involving collaboration with a number of PSBs. The form of collaboration varies, but one professional body has suspended its accreditation programme for the duration of the 1996-98 quality assessment programme period, and will use the reports of assessment visits as a means of ascertaining whether an accreditation visit is necessary.

4. The HEFCW has undertaken a number of initiatives including, inter alia, the RIBA, CCETSW (CYMRU), and the Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visitors. These initiatives have variously involved, or are planned to involve, observation of each others processes; contemporaneous Funding Council and PSB visits; overlap in review team membership; and sharing of documentation.

5. The HEQC is also providing professional and financial support for a pilot project being conducted under the auspices of the Engineering Professors' Council, on the development of a Developmental Integrated Quality Management Framework. The project is supported by all the main engineering institutions, by the HEQC and by the HEFCE, and involves the design and testing - in six engineering departments in England and Scotland - of a draft specification for the Framework, and its alignment with professional accreditation and quality assessment requirements.

6. All these initiatives provide evidence of what is possible, although we would not wish to minimise the difficulties involved in achieving agreement between the various stakeholders. These difficulties include, for example, the constraints placed on bodies with statutory responsibilities, and the possible implications of introducing new programmes requiring professional body accreditation outside a scheduled subject/programme area review cycle.

The constitution and membership of the new agency

The constitution of the new agency

1. We propose that the framework for the constitution of a new independent agency be as follows.

a. It would be a company limited by guarantee, and registered as a charity.
b. The objects of the company would include:
   i. the promotion and maintenance of quality and standards in higher education provided by UK universities and colleges;
   ii. the enhancement of teaching and learning, and the identification and promotion of innovation and good practice in teaching and learning;
   iii. the provision of information and the publication of reports on quality and standards in higher education provided by UK universities and colleges; and
   iv. the provision of advice to government as requested.

Membership of the company

2. We propose that the members of the company, to whom the company's board of directors will be accountable, be the representative bodies of the heads of higher education institutions.

The board of directors

3. We propose that there be 14 directors on the board of the company: four directors appointed by the HEIs' representative bodies; four directors appointed by the funding bodies (the funding councils and DENI); and six 'independent' directors representative of the wider community with an interest in quality and standards in higher education.

4. No director should be a salaried staff member of the HEIs' representative bodies or of the funding bodies appointing directors to the board.

5. The 'independent' directors, with the exception of the first Chairman, would be appointed after wide consultation with relevant bodies, including those representing the students and staff of higher education institutions, other sectors of education, employers, professional and statutory bodies, and the international higher education community.

6. Directors would not be representatives of appointing or other bodies but would be appointed as individuals in their own right.

7. Directors' terms of office would be limited, as would the number of times they might be re-appointed.

Constituting the first board of directors

8. We propose that the process for constituting the first board of directors be as indicated below.

a. The first Chairman of the board would be identified and invited to accept appointment by the Chairman of the Joint Planning Group, after consultation with the members of the Group.

b. There will be consultation within and between the representative bodies and the funding bodies before directors are appointed in order to ensure, as far as possible, a spread of experience.

c. The Chairman-designate and the board members-designate would then invite suggestions for filling the remaining 'independent' places in the board's membership, and the approval of the members of the company to appointments would be sought.

d. Once the Chairman and at least some directors have been identified the first board thus constituted would take steps to appoint the first Chief Executive after advertisement of the position.

Balance of membership of the board

9. In respect of both initial and subsequent appointments to the board of directors, we believe that it will be important to ensure that a balance is achieved, and maintained, among the various interested parties. With this in mind, we propose the appointment by the board of a representative sub-committee, chaired by a member of the board, to be responsible for ensuring wide consultation concerning the appointment of independent members to the board. In respect of appointments from the HEIs' representative bodies and the funding bodies, those appointed would include practising academics, and should reflect, as far as possible, the diversity of the UK higher education sector.

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